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bcc

Subject Range Resources News and Blog Coverage Links

http://myhighplains.com/fulltext?nxd_id=257582

EPA Withdraws Order Against Natural Gas Driller

By: Minjae Park, The Texas Tribune
Updated: April 2, 2012

WASHINGTON D.C. -- The Environmental Protection Agency has withdrawn an administrative order that charged Range Resources, a Fort Worth-based natural gas driller, with contaminating water wells.

The EPA's decision settles the 15-month-long conflict between the federal agency and Range, which had been cleared of the charges last year by the Texas Railroad Commission. Under the EPA order, Range would have had to provide drinking water to residents of two homes in Parker County whose water wells the agency said had been contaminated with methane by Range's natural gas drilling.

"Range is very pleased to see that the EPA's order in Parker County has been withdrawn," said Matt Pitzarella, a Range Resources spokesman. "It's important for people to know that their environment, health and safety is protected, and hopefully this provides them with that comfort."

Jannah Durant, a Dallas-based EPA spokeswoman, said: "Resolving the lawsuits with Range allows EPA to shift the agency's focus in this particular case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction. EPA and Range will share scientific data and conduct further well monitoring in the area, and Range will also provide useful information and access to EPA in support of EPA's scientific inquiry into the potential impacts of energy extraction on drinking water."

Durant would not comment on what prompted the EPA's decision but noted that Range has committed to sampling every three months for the next year at 20 private water wells in southern Parker County.

The Texas Railroad Commission voted unanimously to clear the company of the charges last March after conducting a hearing in January that found that Range did not contaminate water.

"Today the EPA finally made a decision based on science and fact versus playing politics with the Texas economy," said Railroad Commissioner David Porter.

Michael Williams, a former railroad commissioner whose last meeting in March 2011 was the one clearing Range of the charges, said in a statement that the latest development vindicated the commission's decision.

"I have maintained from the very beginning of this case that the EPA was once again overreaching and engaged in a purposeful witch hunt against Texas natural gas producers," he said. "There was not then nor now, as EPA's dismissal demonstrates, evidence that shows that Range Resources in any way harmed drinking water in Parker County."

The Texas Oil & Gas Association called the EPA's dismissal of its administrative order "appropriate."

"The Texas Oil & Gas Association is encouraged that science appears to have prevailed in this instance at the Environmental Protection Agency," said Debbie Hastings, the group's executive vice president. "The EPA's dismissal of this order against Range Resources also validates the Texas Railroad Commission's nearly 100-year legacy of effective regulation of the oil and gas industry."

<http://www.star-telegram.com/2012/04/02/3854754/mendoza-epas-reversal-in-range.html>

Mendoza: EPA's reversal in Range Resource case a reasonable setback to frack attacks

Posted Monday, Apr. 02, 2012

BY MARY MENDOZA

Special to the Star-Telegram

Ending a nearly 18-month saga, the EPA announced Friday that it had withdrawn an order against Range Resources over alleged groundwater contamination in the Barnett Shale.

This brings to a close a local battle reflecting a national controversy being debated in the media over the nature and magnitude of environmental risks associated with the unconventional production of shale gas and oil by hydraulic fracturing.

The battle began in December of 2010, when the Environmental Protection Agency issued an emergency order to Range requiring it to provide alternate potable water supplies to certain residences, conduct an elaborate sampling program in the area, provide methane monitors to area homeowners and develop plans to remediate a contaminated aquifer. In its news release, the EPA trumpeted its order to Range as protection for homeowners against an imminent and substantial threat caused by Range's operations, even though the order was based upon a sampling of only

two wells in the area.

The EPA-Range Resources battle was fought on a number of battlefields. Range took its case to the Texas Railroad Commission, which unanimously concluded that Range was not responsible by pointing to the shallow Strawn Formation as the likely source of the gas in the two wells.

While the EPA sought enforcement of its order in district court, Range challenged it in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. That challenge ultimately led to the EPA's withdrawal of its order to Range, who in turn in a side letter agreed to conduct a yearlong sampling program on 20 water wells in the vicinity of its Parker County operations and to share data with the EPA.

The EPA's statement characterizes its retreat as "a step toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction" and the data from Range's proposed sampling program as information for "EPA's scientific inquiry into the potential impacts of energy extraction on drinking water."

The Range matter raises again a fundamental issue surrounding the amount of data the agency should collect and, more broadly, how sure the agency should be before issuing an emergency order -- especially one not affording the recipient an opportunity for pre-enforcement review.

Many have been critical of the EPA for its "leap before you look" approach -- issuing an order or reaching a conclusion before collecting and analyzing adequate information.

The agency has come under similar criticism for its recently released draft study attempting to link groundwater issues in Pavillion, Wyo., to hydraulic fracturing operations in a nearby natural gas field. In that case, the EPA has agreed to "clarify" the results through additional testing.

Although the EPA is charged with protecting public health, which includes responding to emergencies, the agency should not use its considerable regulatory and enforcement power to target a company and compel action until it has a reasonable and well-founded factual basis for doing so.

Science, not politics and media hype, should be the driver for agency action.

From an administration that pledged to "restore science to its rightful place," and from an agency whose efforts are to be based upon the "best available scientific information," we are still waiting. Mary Mendoza is the administrative partner in the Austin office of Haynes and Boone, L.L.P. She concentrates on environmental and administrative law.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/02/us-usa-fracking-range-idUSBRE8310T420120402>

Government drops water pollution charges against Range

Mon, Apr 2 2012

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Environmental Protection Agency, in another retreat in its oversight of hydraulic fracturing, dropped allegations that Range Resources Corp polluted drinking water in Texas while drilling for natural gas.

The EPA on Friday said it would no longer pursue a lawsuit that alleged Range's drilling had polluted drinking water Parker County, Texas. The suit would have made Range fix wells it claimed were polluting the water.

The EPA has backtracked on oversight of three pollution claims in the last month, as the Obama administration walks a fine line between promoting drilling of vast new resources of domestic fuel and regulating an industry that environmentalists say can pollute water and air supplies.

"Resolving the lawsuits with Range allows EPA to shift the Agency's focus in this particular case away from litigation and towards a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction," an EPA spokesman said in a release.

On March 15 the agency released results from a first round of tests of drinking water at 11 homes in Dimock, Pennsylvania, the first batch of what the EPA announced in January would be tests performed at 60 homes in Dimock. Residents had complained since 2008 of foul smelling water after Cabot Oil & Gas Corp began fracking for gas nearby.

Earlier in March, the agency said it would work with the state of Wyoming to retest water supplies after questions were raised about an EPA draft report showing harmful chemicals from fracking fluids were likely present in an aquifer near the town of Pavillion.

The Obama administration is moving ahead with other regulations and safety tests on fracking. The agency is expected to finalize rules this week on emissions from fracking and other natural gas drilling that causes smog.

The EPA is also studying the actual fracking process, in which companies blast large amounts of sand and water laced with chemicals underground to free oil and natural gas. Initial results of the study, which was mandated by Congress, will be released by the end of the year.

The EPA is expected to release more results on water tests from the remaining 49 homes in Dimock, Pennsylvania in coming weeks.

(Reporting By Timothy Gardner; Editing by Alden Bentley)

<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/local/marcellusshale/7-municipalities-file-suit-over-state-shale-regulations-628784/>

EPA drops order against Range Resources in Parker County case

Dallas Business Journal by Matt Joyce, Staff Writer

Date: Friday, March 30, 2012, 2:21pm CDT

Matt Joyce Staff Writer - *Dallas Business Journal*

The **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** has withdrawn an administrative order it filed against Fort Worth-based Range Resources over water contamination in Parker County.

The EPA filed the “imminent and substantial endangerment order” in December 2010 and said Range’s drilling in Parker County had caused or contributed to the contamination of at least two residential drinking water wells.

The agency ordered Range to stop the contamination, provide drinking water to the two residences and provide methane gas monitors to the homeowners, among other measures.

Range’s challenge against the order was pending in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit when the EPA withdrew the order on Thursday, according to documents filed Friday in the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Texas.

"Resolving the lawsuits with Range allows EPA to shift the agency's focus in this particular case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction," the EPA said in a prepared statement. "EPA and Range will share scientific data and conduct further well monitoring in the area, and Range will also provide useful information and access to EPA in support of EPA's scientific inquiry into the potential impacts of energy extraction on drinking water."

Range said it was pleased with the order's withdrawal.

"It’s important for people to know that their environment, health and safety is protected and hopefully this provides them with that comfort," spokesman Matt Pitzarella said in a statement.

The Railroad Commission of Texas, the state agency that regulates energy resource development, said EPA's decision confirmed the commission's January 2011 finding that Range's natural gas wells were not causing or contributing to contamination of Parker County domestic water wells.

“Today the EPA finally made a decision based on science and fact versus playing politics with the Texas economy,” Commissioner David Porter said.

<http://www.canadafreepress.com/index.php/article/45741>

EPA drops contamination suit against Texas natural gas producer

- *Institute for Energy Research* Tuesday, April 3, 2012

Last Friday, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed to dismiss its 15-month long groundwater contamination case against Texas natural gas operator Range Resources Corporation (RRC). The dismissal of the federal lawsuit is the latest blow to EPA's aggressive regulatory agenda, coming after a slew of court decisions unfavorable to the agency's position. It also sheds a light on flaws with the methodology EPA employs in evaluating the link between natural gas wells and hydrocarbons detected in groundwater resources.

EPA's dispute started in December 2010, when the agency issued an emergency order requiring RRC to comply with numerous directives to address the fact that local water supplies had elevated levels of methane. These directives included sampling air and water at a large area of private water wells and dwellings, providing replacement water supplies for affected households, and to find, plug, and clean up supposed leaks from RRC's wells into the Trinity Aquifer. EPA's emergency order bypassed the state oil and gas regulatory process—overseen by the Texas Railroad Commission—by contending that the Texas regulators had been inadequate in evaluating possible contamination concerns.

Soon after EPA issued its order, however, numerous questions arose about the purported definitive link between the methane in Parker County's water resources and the area's natural gas operations. The presence of methane in underground water alone cannot be taken to mean that natural gas drilling is the cause. Methane is a naturally occurring, non-poisonous gas that can be found in many underground water supplies where no drilling has occurred.

For this reason, the RRC rejected the EPA's attempt to promulgate a stringent final order without allowing opportunity to evaluate the source of the methane, and appealed to the court for relief. Moreover, the Texas Railroad Commission's own scientific evaluation of Parker County's water found no link between the detected methane and RRC's wells.

Similar problems with EPA's methodology occurred in the cases of Pavillion, Wyoming and Dimock, Pennsylvania. In the case of Pavillion, EPA published a draft report last December suggesting that groundwater resources in the town were contaminated by hydraulic fracturing operations. But in March 2012, EPA decided to do more sampling after receiving a considerable criticism over its inconsistent sampling results, unverified scientific methodology, and unwillingness to cooperate with state regulatory officials.

In Dimock, Pennsylvania, EPA also backtracked on its previous claims of groundwater contamination. EPA intervened to supply replacement water to residents amid fears of contamination from hydraulic fracturing, only to later admit that the water in Dimock was safe.

Numerous EPA regulations with estimated economic costs of \$100 million or more per year are currently pending—many of which will directly impact our ability to produce and use energy in the United States—and it remains unclear if the case of EPA v. RRC will translate into positive benefits for the rest of the agency's regulatory agenda. Nonetheless, cases like Parker County are valuable to policymakers seeking to address flaws in the regulatory system, in that they show how

regulations and enforcement actions can be initiated without regard to reasonable alternatives. In that vein, the agreement reached with EPA to rescind its litigation and instead work with RRC to share scientific data and conduct further well monitoring in the area is a positive step toward a model that embraces cooperation and transparency with the need to protect public health and safety.

<http://www.myp perfect automobile.com/featured/nat-gas-controversy-set-explode.html>

Nat. Gas Controversy Set to Explode

In a closely watched lawsuit, the Environmental Protection Agency has dropped out of a case in which it initially claimed that an energy exploration company, Range Resources, was polluting groundwater. This legal punt on the agency's part marks the third time since 2011 that the EPA has begun, and then backed out of legal proceedings where they sought to stop hydraulic fracturing by companies who use the drilling method to develop natural gas resources. The controversy has pitted the U.S. government against the drilling and exploration sector in a high stakes courtroom war that has reached fever pitch. For better or worse though, the EPA cannot stand to face many more losses at the bench. Hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, is a highly efficient way to remove natural gas from the ground. It has been criticized by environmental groups who say that fracking contaminates groundwater. Studies have been inconclusive but tend to support the claims of companies who employ the method. In each instance, the EPA has either dropped the suits and removed administrative allegations of contamination, or has attempted to retest water sources for contamination and failed to prove its claims. In fact, the EPA's own methods of testing have now been brought into question, as the same tests of the same water often bring differing results. Most industry experts agree that the EPA's own credibility has been significantly damaged as a result of its sloppy, unscientific work.

Now, a consensus of sources has begun building a case against the government agency, claiming that fracking is indeed a safe method of natural gas extraction as long as cement seals are used and careful pre-drill analysis is done.

For more information about Range Resources, see this information page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Range_Resources

The Range Resources official company website is at <http://www.rangeresources.com/>

For a data source about hydraulic fracturing and its environmental impact, see the following source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic_fracturing

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